

## Thank you for NOT feeding our wildlife!



Families of Muscovy Ducks are a frequent and familiar sight throughout Miami Springs, waddling along main roads and byways and paddling in the canals. During recent North American Migration counts, their population consistently ranks in the top dozen of the 149 species of birds found in Miami-Dade County. Muscovies are year-round breeders, and local populations, if well-fed, can increase dramatically in a short time. A hen can lay as many as 24 eggs in a single clutch, which will hatch in 35 days.

Although Muscovies are not native to the United States, they have been here for over 100 years since being imported from South America where they have long been known as “good eating.” (If you Google “Muscovy Duck,” you would come back with over 80,000 responses—and a good portion of those would be recipes!)

Fortunately, “our” ducks enjoy protected status, and are not a staple of our dinner tables. Miami Springs has been a bird sanctuary since 1967 (Sec. 90-15). Muscovies are also protected by Florida Statute 828.12 from animal cruelty. However, because local ducks originated in Florida from domestic stock, they are not considered “wildlife” and are not protected by state wildlife laws or the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. State law does prohibit the relocation of Muscovies into wild areas as they may be carriers of diseases which can adversely affect native water-fowl.

So, please do not feed your neighborhood birds and ducks! Although we appreciate that feeding Muscovy ducks is enjoyable, it is often not in their best interest.

First of all, it is not healthy for them as they become dependent on people for food. The best food for ducks is what they eat naturally—algae, insects and a variety of plants which are abundant in our subtropical climate. Humans most often feed them bread and similar items. These have no nutritional value for the duck. Additionally, feeding by humans makes the ducks reliant on such hand-outs, too lazy to continue foraging for their natural dietary items and uneaten “human” food will rot quickly in warm weather.

Second, feeding ducks encourages them to use the neighborhood as their bathroom, leaving droppings on patios, sidewalks and porches. As a result, controversies frequently arise between residents who enjoy the birds and residents who consider them a nuisance. Even duck lovers have complained about the problem of duck droppings on the lawns, drive-ways, patios, and even in their swimming pools. This is not healthy for people, particularly for the children playing in these areas. Wild ducks can spread disease to humans. When small children, the elderly

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and persons with immune system problems directly handle newly-hatched chicks, they may be exposed to salmonella. Muscovies can also transmit disease to wild waterfowl. All confirmed outbreaks of DVE, also known as duck plague (a sometimes-devastating viral infection) in wild waterfowl have been linked to domestic ducks. Fowl cholera is another serious disease that is transmittable between domestic and wild waterfowl. Although we have had no major outbreaks reported yet in Florida, the potential for Muscovies to spread this disease to wild waterfowl is a biological concern.

To conclude on a more pleasant note, some things are "just ducky"! "These ducks play a vital role in Florida's ecological system," states Victor Muvdi, president of the Muscovy Protection Group of Kings Creek, a nonprofit organization in Kendall dedicated to protecting the ducks. "They are beneficial to the environment because they eat mosquitoes, as well as black widow and brown spiders and other pests," Muvdi says. "They are beautiful, gregarious creatures."

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